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Murmurs of Revolution:
Mythical Subversion in Dostoevsky

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Wilkinson College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in English

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June 2020

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ABSTRACT

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by Connor David Guetersloh

Throughout history, revolutions have been plagued by unpredictability; it is all but impossible to know when cultural systems will be turned on their heads. Is there a common motivator, to predict social unrest bubbling beneath the surface of society? I suggest the development of this motivator is detectable by deconstructing Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic patterns within the field of rhetorical mythology. "Mythology," in the rhetorical and linguistic sense developed by Roland Barthes, is the study of a collective system of thinking we subconsciously subscribe to when interpreting meaning, perpetuated by greater society. The struggle for meaning is split into the binary of a powerful Dominant Myth and power-seeking Submissive Myths. By breaking down subtle sociological progression evident in rhetorical mythology, I reveal how Submissive Myths betray their inevitable intent: to revolt against Dominant Myth truth, replacing them with newly crafted signs of their own design, and wield these new truths against the old socio-political order as the new Dominant Myth. This is difficult to predict without a precedent, which is why I analyze three of Fyodor Dostoevsky's novels to establish a template: *Notes From the Underground*, *The Idiot*, and *Demons*. With help from Mikhail Bakhtin's linguistic analysis of Dostoevsky, I chart how each novel feeds into the next towards mythological metamorphoses from written page to reality, charting the inevitability of the Bolshevik Revolution. Once the template is fashioned, I propose an original rhetorical expression of my own: The Subversive Myth. Informed by Paulo Freire's frames of oppression, this new rhetorical myth will uncover the life cycle of revolution with language as the motivator, determining the dashed line along which social reconstruction is directed – a line that appears quite circular in shape.

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1. INTRODUCTION

History offers many instances in which a faint simmer of social unrest quickly explodes into a violent geyser that subsequently overthrows whole systems of understanding. The simmer is not only faint, but nigh impossible to see or predict without hindsight. We might believe that, say, the forces working against the slave trade at once came to the consensus that it was unethical. Perhaps even the French Revolution broke onto the scene overnight, from the discontent of a single city? But we would almost always be wrong in supposing that the metamorphosis of an entire culture is so instantaneous. Social revolution is a process, one that comes about slowly through a subconscious restructuring of language. More specifically, through a transformation in how individuals interact with the linguistic myths that influence their connection to the immediate world around them.

As human history marches on, ideologies and cultural norms consistently revoke and replace each other in a cycle of resignification – that is, redefining what were once widely considered fixed meanings across an indefinite spectrum of subjects. Resignification happens relatively quickly, and with such a subtle hand, that the critic is already transported to the next step of accepting it as a new cultural norm, possibly blinking and missing the exact point of cultural upheaval. The purpose of criticism in Martin Heidegger's ontological analysis of the process is "to return us there, so that we might know the place and be in it as if for the first time, [as] we would...be the bearers of the message of destiny. Can we, as critics, also be its interpreters? We can be if we rightly heed the message of our vocation, which affirms the simultaneity of word and world" (Rosenfeld 541). It might be possible, then, that one form of written word, the

novel, charts this cultural upheaval as it is written simultaneously with the world. The novel at least has this power within the Western world, where systems of education craft and control communication beyond occupation and study. Rosina Lippi-Green explains this power:

As it became possible to make key religious, literary and legal documents available on a wider basis, the standardized written language became a commodity of increasing value. In the first line, the control of this commodity was in the hands of those who were on the front line of teaching reading and writing. Trained clerks and lowly teachers claimed authority, and began to make a living out of telling people what their language should look and sound like. The job was not only to teach writing, but more important, to instill a respect for institutionalized authority in matters of language. This is still the case today.

(Lippi-Green 15)

Because a specific language holds communicative authority through the public's general acceptance of it as a norm, revolutions do not necessarily begin with a bang. Rather, they slowly garner enough power to influence and transform entire modes of thinking – slow enough that social reality is reflected on the pages of notable authors in each era. The catalyst subconsciously captured by novelists in this social reaction is linguistic mythology. Linguistic mythology, pioneered by Roland Barthes in the field of semiotics, is the study of the determinant factor that influences social understanding and propagates reigning voices of power: the myth.

Both the myth and the novel are necessary forms of communication for marking a common basis of understanding practiced within society – how members of different

classes and beliefs most effectively interact with each other on level dialogic ground. Whether through the story, the language of the author, or the reception of audiences, the novel cannot escape mythological constraints in place at the time of its conception any more than a child can escape the genes of its parent. But one can see that dialogic ground is never level in a rhetorical sense, for myths are in a constant state of revolution against each other. The goal of this thesis, after establishing the structure of myth and stabilizing the implications of its permeation, is to fashion a template of revolution using the novel. Such a template requires an author who wrote at a time near the point of historical revolution, whose works reflect the multiple clashing myths of their time. Fyodor Dostoevsky, who authored the culturally timeless moral classics *The Brothers Karamazov* and *Crime and Punishment*, will act as the first building block in uncovering if such a precedent can be set. Dostoevsky wrote actively in the years leading up to the Bolshevik Revolution, from 1868 to 1880 (he died in 1881, thirty-six years before the revolution). The three novels used in my study of mythological revolution, *Notes From Underground* (1864), *The Idiot* (1869), and *Demons* (1872), were written in the same chronological order as occurs the mythological three-step process culminating in revolution that I propose in this paper. Mikhail Bakhtin's scholarship on Dostoevsky's use of language serves as a core text for the study. There are intricate connections between the myths of the worlds Dostoevsky crafted and the linguistic theories in Bakhtin's criticism, made clear in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*:

The dialogic nature of the word is revealed in his work with enormous force and with an acute palpability. Metalinguistic research into the nature of this dialogicality, and especially into the diverse varieties of double-voiced discourse

and its influence on various aspects of the structure of speech, finds in

Dostoevsky's creative art extraordinarily rich material. (Bakhtin, *Problems* 265)

That is to say, by looking at the clashing of languages in dialogue with each other through social action, most specifically actions made by clashing or consolidating myths, we might uncover a pattern that charts a singular social reality by watching the clash between two subjective realities – one that is oppressive, and one that is revolutionary.

But setting the template is not the final step; once we are familiar with the epistemological nature of mythology and its simultaneous ontological presence in both the word and the world, we must ask, “Why?” What is the teleological implication of mythology's impact on rhetoric in individualistic and societal purposes? How does understanding the cycle of mythology help us to understand our personal reality, and the reality of a multi-voiced society outside of us? For these questions, we turn to Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* for some guidance, and I will suggest a new category of myth: the “Subversive Myth.” The Subversive Myth is my Newton's Law behind social transformation, the force that moves society towards a point of revolution and then pushes it over, only to begin the next cycle. Once the Subversive Myth is defined, we have in our possession both the formula and its constant; we will be able to predict, or at least understand a bit better, transformation in both the word and the world.

2. THE STRUCTURAL COMPOSITION OF LINGUISTIC MYTHOLOGY

When I say “mythology,” I do not refer to a cultural legend or folklore, but rather the study of a semiotic structure (that structure being myth) that tells the very real story behind how we, as active creators and consumers of signs, associate with collective meaning. Roland Barthes defines a myth by its adaptability as a form of language, so long as it remains “a system of communication...a message,” and not “an object, concept, or idea” (Barthes, “Myth Today” 2). The myth, therefore, is empty until filled with language. The power to fulfill that emptiness lies in interpretations by the internal individual upon receiving various interpretations of certain signs provided to that individual by the external world. That is, the individual is acted upon by society, and they in turn, by then positing themselves into society, lend power to a specific myth; the conclusion at the end of a dialogue with the world and oneself is the beginning of a dialogue with oneself and the world.

The external “world” I speak of is a collection of interpretations applied to a polyphonic makeup of signs – keep in mind that the interpretations and the signs are separate, yet dependent upon one another. By choosing any one interpretation, the individual subscribes to a collective understanding of meaning that groups certain signs together to emanate an explicit purpose, ideology, and reality: a myth. The nature of the specific myth does no matter; it can be consolidating or contradictory, idiosyncratic or common to the person’s relationship with their self or society – no matter the circumstance, no person exists outside myth. Unless, of course, they exist outside language. Myth is complex, calling forth all at once the meanings behind both personal and collective ideologies, images, language, and the senses: “Myth sees in them only the

same raw material; their unity is that they all come down to the status of a mere language” (Barthes, “Myth Today” 3). So long as its purpose is to represent meaning, a myth remains unrestrained, “not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message” (Barthes, “Myth Today” 1). It stands to reason, then, that some utterances are louder than others down the chamber of time, as “it is precisely because they are historical that history can very easily suppress them” (Barthes, “Myth Today” 6).

Language in action, not language in study, breeds myths and fosters their ecosystem. Mythology is not the study of myths in their natural habitat, but a dissection that occurs outside of their realm of being, regardless of whether they are alive or dead. Mythology “is a part of both semiology inasmuch as it is a formal science, and ideology inasmuch as it is an historical science: it studies ideas-in-form” (Barthes, “Myth Today” 2). By separating a myth from its natural charge in influencing and being influenced by society, what becomes prevalent and studied is the ideology purported by the myth. Revolution is a part of mythology, because, as a collective societal form changes in primary ideology, so do the mythical forms that represent and influence all language existing within its dominion. Human behavior is as much a component of mythology as human speech, for the idea (signified) formed before the utterance (signifier) must have its roots in some other language that shapes its form and purpose. “Any semiology postulates a relation between two terms, a signifier and a signified. This relation concerns objects which belong to different categories, and this is why it is not one of equality but equivalence” (Barthes, “Myth Today” 2). Such a “chicken or the egg” scenario is similar to the novel, a mouthpiece of common language aimed at society, yet crafted from the

collective consciousness of myth that structured the society before the novel was even conceived. A novel, among other artistic acts of language, has the potential to act as a mirror through which society is reflected; myth is the refraction seen in that mirror from a skewed angle, for “its function is to distort [meaning], not to make disappear” (Barthes, “Myth Today” 7). Those familiar with Kenneth Burke will be reminded of his work in “Terministic Screens”:

The dramatistic view of language, in terms of 'symbolic action,' is exercised about the necessarily *suasive* nature of even the most unemotional scientific nomenclatures...Even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality. (45)

It is the observer who skews the angle through personal identification with a myth, but their social order has already refracted an image that perpetuates its own existence or power over other realities that would claim that power instead. The myth given priority in one culture’s collective subconscious as an understanding reached by the majority of individuals, yet rarely addressed directly except perhaps as what is “ethical” or “right,” is known as the “Dominant Myth” – the ideological reality with the greatest power scope of reflection and deflection.

It must be noted that the myth cannot be dominant on its own, given that it is the forming of reality; rather, it is its association with the ideology behind its particular sign that denotes whether it is dominant or submissive. Bakhtin stresses the equivalence of sign and ideology:

An ideological product is not only itself a part of a reality (natural or social)...it also...reflects and refracts another reality outside itself. Everything ideological possesses *meaning*: it represents, depicts, or stands for something lying outside itself. In other words, it is a *sign*. *Without signs there is no ideology*. (Bakhtin, *Language* 50)

The Dominant Myth is so-called because its ideology has prevailed above other myths and currently shapes reality with the largest footprint. It is therefore the Dominant Myth, influenced by the ideology of the sign that informs its linguistic makeup, that is usually considered an oppressor because there can only be one Dominant Myth in a society over a specific understanding of a sign at any given time. The other not-so-powerful myths, even by only a little, are relegated to the title of “Submissive Myth.” Submissive Myths are suppressed by the Dominant Myth, which enforces the reflection of its own definition of reality, deflects all other meanings. Through mythical revolution, however, Submissive Myth overtakes the position of Dominant Myth, thereby achieving newfound dominance for the oppressed over their oppressor, with one ideology to define them all. Until the next revolution, that is.

Before addressing revolutionary implications, we must understand what myth is on a fundamental, chemical level. Recognize that the building block of myth is the sign, explained by Ferdinand de Saussure:

The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image. The latter is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses.

The sound-image is sensory, and if I happen to call it ‘material,’ it is only in that

sense, and by way of opposing it to the other term of the association, the concept, which is generally more abstract. (66)

Saussure goes on to “propose to retain the word *sign* to designate the whole and to replace *concept* and *sound-image* respectively by *signified* and *signifier*” (Saussure 67). The signified is a mental impression caused by our understanding of a thing, a typically material or corporeal symbol that exists in the realm of reality, though it can be a concept or idea just as well as an object (once it has been defined beyond recognizance as an external condition within an individual’s state of reality). For the sake of consistency within this template, let’s identify the signified as a common Russian concept in Dostoevsky’s time: “Aristocratic Nobility.” The material determinant for this signified is the autonomous person itself, the Noble, and their identification with class through social status, wealth or lineage; that identification is the signifier, which grants them the title of Noble recognized by the general public. The signifier, as explained earlier, is our personal mental process of linguistic particulars “because we regard the words of our language as sound-images” (Saussure 66). By joining a mere individual, the human being alone, to a certain lineage or position in society, the sign of “Aristocratic Noble” is formed. This is the first order of signification, with the final product in semiotic understanding being a “sign.” Very few argue with this taxonomy, this sign that represents a current accepted reality or system of understanding through language alone. The signifier is an abstraction, some form of identification that relates to feeling or thought, and can at least be determined by its existence on a plane of social interaction. The concept of nobility has no power except that which society grants it when attached to an individual, and a signifier has no power except that which society grants it when

attached to a signified. A signified and a signifier form a sign; an individual and their social class, lineage or wealth form a Noble.

What becomes contested is not definition, reached by the first taxonomical order of a sign, but myth, the psychological second order of sign making. Once the first pair has been made in signification – the first sign – it becomes self-evident, a necessary valid foundation in linguistic cooperation so that a binary might exist when debating the further mythical implications of that sign. To take the next step, towards myth, we proceed to the second order of signification charted by mythologist Roland Barthes. “Myth is a peculiar system, in that it is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it: it is a second-order semiological system” (Barthes, “Myth Today” 3). Again, to connect with this project’s template founded in Dostoevsky, let’s identify the new signifier in relation to the new signified, the full myth, as “The Noble Noble.” The sign of Aristocratic Nobility now becomes the new signifier, as “the signifier can be looked at, in myth, from two points of view: as the final term of the linguistic system, or as the first term of the mythical system” (Barthes, “Myth Today” 4). That is, the sign from the first order of signification is the new signifier in the second order of signification – the creation of the myth. The new signifier is now the Aristocratic Noble fashioned by the first order of signification, performed earlier. It is paired with a new signified, this time an ideology– the understanding that, because of the inherent possession of power implied by nobility, holding onto one’s status or position or wealth requires a certain fiber of moral character: the “Noble Noble.” “Aristocratic Nobility” is a sign, a visible structure recognized by cultural order, but the “Noble Noble” is a myth, a combination of sign and ideology to refract reality at the behest of certain parties that purport it. The social reality

formed– the myth enforced by the class of people considered “elite” so that they might retain that title and its benefits – is that Nobles are noble individuals, and therefore deserving of respect and esteem. This perspective presents those it represents with a linguistic source of power in the minds of the peasantry.

But myth is anything but static: “Naturally, everything is not expressed at the same time: some objects become the prey of mythical speech for a while, then they disappear, others take their place and attain the status of myth” (Barthes, “Myth Today” 1). Everything is imbued with myth, for this meaning-making goes beyond conventional communication, as “speech of this kind is a message. It is therefore by no means confined to oral speech. It can consist of modes of writing or of representations,” not limited to images, entertainment, or even public events (Barthes, “Myth Today” 1). In other words, revolution is part of the eternal life cycle of a myth. Besides structurally, myth differs from the sign in its subjectivity coefficient; due to its concrete situation within the social realm, it is paradoxically redefined by societies while simultaneously influencing the way in which individuals consume and create signs. The “Noble Noble” becomes the mythical goal of its respective realm of social construction, actively involved in interpretive meaning from the social level all the way down to the individual. It is not merely a passive symbol or ingredient waiting to be decoded, but an influencing force that is often taken for granted as the set reality. The Dominant Myth in Dostoevsky’s Russia was that the Aristocratic Nobility, those laying claim to the title “Noble Nobles,” likewise staked a claim for respect and power because they possessed high class and wealth, and it was offered as the only valid reality. Such is the state of a civilization entrenched in a Dominant Myth dictated by nobility. At the surface, it justifies itself as a

stabilizer of security and productivity in a nation joined together by a certain ideology. Under the surface, it helps keep the power and class system perpetuated by the “Noble Nobles” preserved. Society both possesses myth and is possessed by it.

The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia was inevitable, given this monopoly on meaning. It clearly did not result from mutual good feelings, but, rather, from disagreement in the second order of signification – not in the perception of the sign, but in the establishment of the myth. The result was the creation of a binary opposition to the Dominant Myth by the peasant class: the concept of the “Ignoble Noble.” The revolutionary peasant accepted the nobility’s first order of signification, the defining of the Aristocratic Noble, for three reasons. First, the sign formed by the dominant class defines his own myth by virtue of its opposition; without the “Noble Noble,” the “Ignoble Noble” would have no power, because it would have no force to overcome. Secondly, regarding the signified and the signifier, “the two elements are intimately united, and each recalls the other” (Saussure 66). To change the meaning of a sign, one would have to isolate and erase the connotations of either the signified or signifier, which is impossible because this would require the resignification of a language itself, rather than mythology. Lastly, the sign is too entrenched in common language, too immutable to be redefined by anything other than time:

The signifier, though to appearances freely chosen with respect to the idea that it represents, is fixed, not free, with respect to the linguistic community that uses it. The masses have no voice in the matter, and the signifier chosen by language could be replaced by no other. (Saussure 71)

Their second order, now entering mythological construction, takes the sign in a different direction than the nobility would. The Russian working class, dubbed by Marx as the “Proletariat,” creates a new kind of myth from their dissatisfaction; that Aristocratic Nobility, dubbed the “Bourgeoise” by Marx, is not noble at all. The Proletariat still recognizes the Bourgeoisie as noble in status, only because it is that very status that deludes the elite into thinking they have a right to oppress. In the Proletariat myth of the “Ignoble Noble,” the signifier recognizes that, because the Nobility possesses high class and wealth, the peasant class is prevented subscription to either. Their titles and wealth are safeguarded so long as they take advantage of the working class, who are oppressed by a societal divide that is neither fluid nor beneficial to their side of the binary. The Dominant Myth shares its first order of signification, as well as its second order’s signified, with this new myth. It is the second-order signifier of the “Ignoble Noble” that attempts to poison the title of Nobility with traits of corruption, unfairness, inhumanity, and oppression. For that is the nature of language, and of myth, since nothing simply comes into being on its own, without force. “Motivation is necessary to the very duplicity of myth: myth plays on the analogy between meaning and form, there is no myth without motivated form” (Barthes, “Myth Today” 9). This opposing reality seeks to undermine the Dominant Myth with the absurdity of its subjective truth and replace it with what its primary thinkers consider a truer or better reflection of society. This opposing reality is the “Submissive Myth.” When determining power, “what the world supplies to myth is an historical reality, defined, even if this goes back quite a while, by the way in which men have produced or used it; and what myth gives in return is a natural image of this

reality” (Barthes, “Myth Today” 16). Submissive Myth, by nature of its existence, opposes the image that defines itself as the most natural.

The basic comprehension of linguistic mythology and the power of certain signs over others that I have outlined above are fundamental to the purpose of this thesis. Yet, they are not the purpose itself – that purpose is to predict, or at least uncover the nature of, the tipping point of social change. Though myth works through language and signs, it is mostly concerned with behavior and social psychology; what society is compelled to do, in accordance with or defiance against the Dominant Myth, is the natural process of evolving language. The subtle existence of multiple myths, of varying voices, is something we’ve come to accept as part of natural life. But myth is vulnerable, despite being built on mutually asserted signs. There is always the possibility, and without doubt the drive, to make new meaning:

Language lends itself to myth in another way: it is very rare that it imposes at the outset a full meaning which is impossible to distort. This comes from the abstractness of its concept: the concept of tree is vague, lends itself to multiple contingencies. True, a language always has at its disposal a whole appropriating organization (this tree, the tree which, etc.). But there always remains, around the final meaning, a halo of virtualities where other possible meanings are floating: the meaning can almost always be interpreted. One could say that a language offers to myth an open-work meaning. Myth can easily insinuate itself into it, and swell there: it is a robbery by colonization. (Barthes, “Myth Today” 12)

The arbitrary nature of the sign allows for diverse perspectives, and those diverse perspectives branch out, not into multiple conceptions of the sign in question, but its

mythical implications. Occasionally, much to the discomfort of a seemingly stable system, one of many Submissive Myths tries to break the ceiling determined by Dominant Myth and rewrite the current cultural frame – to right the robbery Barthes describes, with what might be considered another, more righteous robbery. What occurs can range from a widespread movement of rebirth and celebration, to a bitter and divisive conflict in portions of government, to a bloody revolution where the lines of right and wrong are blurred. Nevertheless, I propose that the chaos of social upheaval follows a three-step pattern in its transition from the realm of myth to the reality of action – from the individual to the social – through a metamorphic process of resentment, rejection, and revolution. This pattern can be traced by one of the tangible snapshots in a certain time of language: the novel.

3. DOSTOEVSKY AND THE NOVEL

Fyodor Dostoevsky is my case study of a “mythical novelist.” When I say mythical, I mean that his works are representations of myths to be studied by critics, rather than mythological, which would suggest that Dostoevsky himself studied and addressed myths directly with intent through his works. So, Fyodor Dostoevsky is a mythical novelist, not a mythological novelist. He was actively writing right before both the Silver Age of Russian literature and the Bolshevik Revolution, a revolutionary era that was “like a surgical operation that left ‘many Russian intellectuals dead, others castrated, and some rejuvenated...Any upheaval leaves the masses with a profound sense of disorientation, and the Bolshevik Revolution was no exception” (Trotsky 40-41). Dostoevsky’s major works reflect the refraction represented by the Dominant Myths of aristocracy (those prescribing to the “Noble Noble”) over the Submissive Myths of socialism (those believing in the “Ignoble Noble”). But said refraction still does reflect the future, as these novels warn how and why the myths might reverse their situations through a simultaneous literal and mythological revolution. The literal revolution, the call for social upheaval, was already alive and kicking under the banner of Karl Marx. Dostoevsky challenged the new horizon proposed by Marx in his *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, particularly the limited horizon defined by the pamphlet’s materialist, anti-individualist core idea, that “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles” (Marx Chapter 1). But he still expressed discontent with the current social order as well, which was no less materialistic, and clearly exercised oppression along a political and classist line that will become clear through the novels addressed in this study.

Caught between myths, Dostoevsky raised political, behavioral, moral, spiritual questions in a multi-voiced environment. He both challenged and reinforced his culture's Dominant Myth, but primarily pushed back against socialism's Submissive Myth and how it might cripple the thinking individual:

Dostoevsky's critique of socialism, then, begins with its essential atheism...As Dostoevsky wrote in his notebook for 1863-1864: 'The socialists want to regenerate humans, to *liberate* them, to present them without God and the family. They conclude that having forcibly changed the economic way humans live they will achieve their goals.' (Lantz 404)

Dostoevsky's themes were humanistic problems of different grades, but the pen remained the same – crafted from the hand of ideological power. Ideology is the life behind myth, the force that drives, not the myth itself, but the understanding behind the myth, told through numbers that form an abstract collective frequently called the “majority.” Myth can only speak when it is given a voice, and that voice is enforced through means of communication, which in turn is echoed by the sympathizers of said myth. This forms a binary characterized by the opposing forces of dominant and submissive signs, which establish in any singular culture the nature of presupposed meanings on certain subjects, whether constantly chosen or not. With the Bolshevik revolution, the people subscribing to socialism determined, through violent means, that socialism would be the new Dominant Myth. It is quite possible that it was a revolution that began in language, as “first and foremost, the very foundations of a Marxist theory of ideologies...are closely bound up with problems of the philosophy of language” (Bakhtin, *Language* 50). Karl Marx's Proletariat granted their new myth power with mass association to a specific

ideology, thereby taking away power from the Bourgeoisie. No longer restricted to the fringe reality in the countryside, but as the forward-thinking Dominant Myth of an entire culture, and even state.

Yet there is a difference between myth and ideology, despite their reliance on each other: myth is not so much concerned with ideas or concepts, as ideology is, but rather with the forms through which language and those very ideologies are conveyed. In fact, the whole definition of myth is not really a definition in the conventional sense at all, but a formula – like that of an element on the periodic table – patterned after the biology of the sign as proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure. To reiterate, “the linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image. The latter is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses” (Saussure 66). This suggests, then, that the relation between the two is subconsciously defined, for, once it passes into the realm of language, the concept loses all ambiguity and becomes the physical representation of a word and its object: the complete rhetorical sign. “Since I mean by sign the while that results from the associating of the signifier with the signified, I can simply say: *the linguistic sign is arbitrary*” which leaves it vulnerable to multiple flexible interpretations (Saussure 67). The power of one interpretation of the sign, even if it consolidates others that are similar but not quite the same, is determined by an external force that influences the perception of those who use it in social spheres. This external force is a myth; the myth’s nature is to make a certain reality appear natural.

Consequently, though we are going to define the structure itself, a sign is subjective enough to be personable, malleable to the perspective of the individual in

helping define their placement within mythical binaries. Saussure argues that “the term should not imply that the choice of the signifier is left entirely to the speaker...the individual does not have the power to change a sign in any way once it has become established in the linguistic community,” but that it is “unmotivated...arbitrary in that it actually has no natural connection with the signified” (68-69). Yet, by very nature of its unnatural connection, we must presume that the connection was made through human construction or interference. Indeed, that leaves the whole system of a sign open to change, not necessarily at the hand of the individual, who, by accepting the “truths” of already established simplistic signs in comprehending more complicated signs thereby allow themselves to be defined as well. That is, by the hands of groups of individuals who have defined themselves when they associate their perspectives with one side of the sign or the other – with the Dominant or the Submissive Myth. Because societies determine the power of a sign, it follows that these sub-societies can determine when power ought to be withdrawn from one united bank of signs and stockpiled in another to drive it out of business. Such is the nature of mythical revolution.

I will determine whether or not it is possible to see a path of cultural upheaval in the midst of its transition through novels, using Dostoevsky to catch society in the act of subverting and replacing Dominant Myth. The archetypes in Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the Underground*, *The Idiot*, and *Demons*, are a case study for characters’ interactions with mythology, tracing private sentiment to public consensus that would capitulate in the resignification of Russian mythology by the Submissive Myth: the Bolshevik Revolution. The effect is all the more potent in that these novels are establishing the progression of steps directed towards attaining social upheaval in real time, as Dostoevsky wrote them in

chronological order and each novel corresponds with where their rhetorical revelations occur within the process. *Notes from the Underground* introduces us to the resentment born from the individual's internal oppression at the hand of Dominant Myths. *The Idiot* furthers the power of the Submissive Myth as "the ideological chain stretches from individual consciousness to individual consciousness, connecting them together" to challenge and reject the Dominant Myth since "signs emerge, after all, only in the process of interaction between one individual consciousness and another" (Bakhtin, *Language* 52). *Demons* brings the transition to a head, when the Submissive Myth violently overthrows the power (though not necessarily the position) of the Dominant Myth.

Clarifying such a development across this series of novels might provide a template through which we may chart the transition of myth in action – how the Submissive Myth overthrows the Dominant Myth. To help understand Dostoevsky's crafting of language for this purpose, I consult rhetorician and Dostoevsky scholar, Mikhail Bakhtin: "We have in mind primarily the ideology that served Dostoevsky as his principle for seeing and representing the world, precisely a form-shaping ideology, for upon it ultimately depend the functions of abstract ideas and thoughts in the work" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 92-93). While on the surface our chosen author for this mythological template seems driven by ideology more than anything else, he depicts the form through what Bakhtin calls a "polyphonic nature." Dostoevsky's three texts, following his inclination to dialogic form, progress from individual resentment to nationwide revolution – which consequently might then lend themselves as a measurement of literary works of the present, discarding the need for benefit of hindsight. Socio-cultural

upheavals will then no longer remain such an unpredictable enigma to critics, traced out in their placement within taxonomical progression before they even occur.

4. NOTES FROM UNDERGROUND AND RESENTMENT

Social phenomena stem from individuals, not unlike soil into which consciousness is planted. These seeds, reliant on the dirt around them, must first be fertilized separately before being sown together in one garden, lest they grow to choke each other out.

One seed conscious of the garden it was planted in is the narrator of Dostoevsky's *Notes From Underground* (1864), known quite simply as the "Underground Man." He is a paradoxalist, a retired civil servant who isolates himself out of hatred for society as a whole, both socialist and elitist: "The Underground Man will not relinquish his agony: it is his" in a society that refuses him power over himself or others, directed "at the 'laws of nature' which have been humiliating him more than anything else in his life" (Jackson, *Dostoevsky's* 13). These "laws of nature" refer to multiple Dominant Myths of Russian political culture (including the "Ignoble Noble" analyzed earlier) that feed an overarching Dominant Myth that the Underground Man detests: that humans are social individuals, defined by society and not themselves. It is not a position designated by the myth that humiliates and agonizes him, but rather his self-consciousness of his neighbors' subservience to that power, and his powerlessness to make them see what he sees or detach himself from the society that makes it so. Power comes from a position outside of his isolationist, individualistic existence, since "the social self is simply that which knows itself to be social and maximizes its social nature in being 'we-oriented'" (Hale 162). The Underground Man is fully and regrettably aware of his need to integrate with society; otherwise, technically, he does not exist, for he has not been defined. Out of resentment, he defies this Dominant reality by condemning adherents to its superstructure, to assert

agency over, if nothing else, his own identity. The Underground Man's anger comes from the natural desire of human beings for belonging, the result of his suppressing that need through isolation because he sees this necessity as being corrupted into a tool for power. He laments the powerlessness of man on his own:

Leave us to ourselves, without a book, and we'll immediately get confused, lost – we won't know what to join, what to hold to, what to love and what to hate, what to respect and what to despise. It's a burden for us even to be men – men with real, *our own* bodies and blood; we're ashamed of it, we consider it a disgrace, and keep trying to be some unprecedented omni-men. (Dostoevsky, *Notes* 119)

The power to identify oneself lies outside the individual's identification in a binary paradox; the Dominant Mythology dictates that individual power and definition is nullified once a man steps outside of the social sphere, yet that individual power is still beholden to society's agency over its own when it agrees to join the dialogue. The Underground Man realizes that, either way, he is given no opportunity to control the power of agency, and his individuality means quite close to nothing under the lens of this particular Dominant Myth. That Dominant Myth sees the "Social Man" The myth chosen by the Underground Man, a Submissive Myth, denounces his colleagues' posturing to have some semblance of control over their own definitions – to be "omni-men," beyond the command of what dialogic language dictates and convince oneself that individuality is not under the jurisdiction by society.

The Underground Man knows that each man's agency to define his own being has been predetermined by society. This helplessness irritates him, not only because of the position of powerlessness it puts him in, but because his fellow countrymen seem

completely ignorant of the fact in their pursuit of ambition. Their unawareness is intentionally restricted within an ideological hierarchy represented by their true obsession: titles. Sometimes as complicated as a hereditary name, sometimes as simple as an earned occupation, and sometimes as arbitrary as their relationship to another person, titles are the meaning-makers of the Underground Man's Russia. He resents their ignorant mania over titles because he is forced to obsess over such trivial matters as well, resenting himself in a different manner as he realizes "that to be overly conscious is a sickness, a real, thorough sickness" (Dostoevsky, *Notes* 8). Said sickness is a malnutrition of meaning, because the Underground Man looks on his society and sees the promise of social pluralism – that, when it becomes part of the greater society, the individual will retain its identity. Not so, the Underground Man realizes, for in "social pluralism...the self is not defined by what it *is*, not by some static ontological content, and not by some specifiable ideological content, but by what it *does*, how it performs the practice of social orientation" (Hale 162). The Underground Man sees that, if one does not become involved in the social hierarchy of titles, one is never recognized as an individual. But, once one is recognized as an individual by joining society, that individual's identity is substituted with the title that society has given them. It is a pitfall the Underground Man spends the entire novel trying to climb out of.

Titles are a good, bartered and traded for based on one's performance in society; the Underground Man is retired, he has no friends, and he does not even have a real name as far as the reader can tell. Participating in society only by condemning the Dominant Myth that rules it, he rejects the idea of social pluralism and sides with the Submissive Myth. He thereby gives up all right to titles and loses all meaning, drawing into himself

since, within the social sphere, “the sole and express purpose of every intelligent man is babble – that is, a deliberate pour from empty into void” (Dostoevsky, *Notes* 19). His hopelessness in finding recognized meaning gives that babble a constant, self-aware strain of nihilistic analysis. Even the frontrunner of nihilistic thought, Friedrich Nietzsche, who considered Dostoevsky “an abhorrent individual, at one and the same time wholly Christian in feeling and thoroughly sadistic,” proclaimed “What a lucky find!” when “the voice of the blood...made itself heard so clearly, and [his] joy was immense” (Fueleop-Miller 50). Dostoevsky’s reflection of the nihilistic mind is a refraction of societal propriety, forcing the Underground Man into an ironic bargain; he becomes willing to forfeit individuality to the Submissive Myth (that one need not be a social individual to determine one’s meaning) in the fight for individual meaning against the dictation of Dominant Myth (that one must be a social individual to have meaning). In order for the Submissive Myth to overthrow Dominant Myth, it must first accept that the current system, though unacceptable, is still a valid reality when it comes to making meaning. However, by allowing itself to be acknowledged, the current Mythological structure becomes vulnerable to subversion, specifically on the terms of language and definitions. Because that is what revolution is really about: replacing current structures of widespread understanding.

Consider Dominant Myth in the perception of a common universal vice, laziness. Laziness was generally regarded, to all political and social parties in Russia who were primarily focused on ambition and upward mobility within their political parties, as a negatively inclined adjective. The ambitious man, the man worthy of his earnings or admirable for his devotion to some “cause,” was an adherent to Dominant Myth in

Russian society. But this is a form that Dostoevsky saw could be exploited, based on the fact that the deservedness of this “worth” was completely empty of definition. If society determines whether or not you have identity, if nobility is the determinant of whether or not your agency is defined, how much of that does ambition actually achieve for you and how much is given by society out of respect for the Dominant Myth? The Underground Man mourns so: “Oh, if only I were doing nothing only out of laziness. Lord, how I’d respect myself then. Respect myself precisely because I’d at least be capable of having laziness in me” (Dostoevsky, *Notes* 19). This is not an offhand appraisal by Dostoevsky on the virtues of laziness, nor is he using the narrator as a vessel through which he can speak on his distaste for the subject. It is a statement of sarcastic self-affirmation for the Underground Man, when he proclaims, “It means I’m positively defined; it means there’s something to say about me. ‘Lazybones!’ –now, that is a title and a mission, it’s a career, sirs. No joking, it really is” (Dostoevsky, *Notes* 19). The myth he subverts is not the virtual truth that “lazy is a negative,” though it may appear that way without subtext. Nor is it satire, linking laziness with the narrator, who is only an extreme exaggeration of Dostoevsky’s cynical half. Instead, the Submissive Myth at play is that laziness affirms the arbitrary emptiness of titles, thereby equalizing the playing field; those who are ambitious have worked as hard to achieve their title as those who are lazy – the only difference is that the Lazybones achieves it by his own hand, rather than society’s. If such a concept were to gain traction in reality, this would empower the Underground Man, who would no longer be oppressed by his lack of titles, and weaken elitists, who would no longer hold power over the social structure’s domination of language. What’s more, the lazybones would appear in charge of his own meaning, whereas the elite would be

beholden to the definitions granted by society. So what is to stop the Underground Man from taking control of this system, thereby taking for himself the titles that elites reserved for their own kind? This is the struggle of Marx's proletariat, and the reasonable resentment born from repression under the Dominant Myth. This is where the Submissive Myth gains a foothold against oppressors, and a revolution finds its start.

Karl Marx's is the ideal Socialist struggle, in which complaints against a social hierarchy constructed of nobility and titles giving people their sense of worth led to change. Whether derived from the Manifesto of the Communist Party, which lumps its major conflict into the binary war between Bourgeoisie and Proletarians, or the dominant Russian political myth at the time, where noble blood and military rank subtly compete for higher positions of authority, Dostoevsky despairs of them all. During his imprisonment in Siberia, Dostoevsky "encountered a socialism that had taken on a much more revolutionary cast...Dismissing the essential spiritual nature of human beings, the socialists can concern themselves only with man's material needs" (Lantz 403). The root of the problem to him is the restriction of man's worth to the material world, or Atheism and the logical nihilistic end it leads to. That is the purpose of titles in Dostoevsky's understanding of class; to define the accumulation of material wealth and political or social experience, things that do not last beyond this material world. It is an even more dangerous extension of the Underground Man's thirst for belonging and purpose, to become an "insect" and join the hive built by those denied titles – the hive formed under a Socialist Submissive Myth that would be the precursor to the Bolshevik Revolution. The Underground Man, oppressed by titles, subverts the meaning of positive definitions of social rank in the public eye, and revolts by naming himself with a title based in merit.

Of course, this merit can be falsely constructed, or wrongly attributed positive meaning, such as the title “Lazybones.” The Underground Man revels in his interpretation of that title to show that he has overcome the Dominant Myth, willfully subverted because he has no other titles with which to describe himself. He is empty as a human being, requiring some form of self-affirmation but being met only with isolation because his myth is empty, formed only by his own understanding of language. This is how myth oppressed the Russian man, but also how the subversion of that myth, established on a wider collective consciousness, would cut a path for violent revolution that leads aboveground. The Underground Man needs other Underground Men to make new meaning.

Even so, revolution cannot be born from resentment alone. Oppression must be given voice to identify with a Submissive Myth and enter the social sphere. Without a vocalized idea of what it is he resents, and the desire for action against it, the Underground Man will remain trapped underground because there is no defining what separates him from aboveground. But he *does* recognize the desire, for, although the Underground Man dismisses his ignorant neighbor as no more than “an insect,” he actually admits he “wanted many times to become an insect” (Dostoevsky, *Notes* 8). He has convinced himself that he objects to the social order and its Dominant Myths because they are wrong in some logical or ethical sense, but the truth is that the roots of his resentment sprung from moral and logical outrage that holds isolationism in their roots; the Underground Man, because of his differing definitions and intellectual oppression, has been subjected to isolation. When he forces himself to attend social obligations, such as parties honoring fellow members of the Dominant Myth that he forces his way into, his

reception always imparts a feeling of worthlessness: “I insolently looked around at them all with bleary eyes. But it was as if they had already forgotten me entirely...They were having a noisy, loud, merry time *for themselves*” (Dostoevsky, *Notes* 71). This inner desire to “become an insect,” to do as the rest of society does and ignore the stark contrast between Dominant and Submissive Myth, is a necessary catalyst for the germination of social upheaval. It is a socialistic envy, not for other men’s material wealth as Marx might hold as the necessary root of all action against oppression, but for personal peace procured by the entitlement being one with the Dominant Myth provides. The Underground Man wants fulfillment through wealth or prestige without the accumulation of the language’s designating materials; he must be recognized by the Dominant Myth to actualize his identity. Once he has purported a society where this is true, where he is worth just as much in the eyes of society as any nobleman because he has defined that distinction and found it just, then he believes he no longer has to worry about a Dominant Myth defining his identity. Though, of course, he has already sold his identity to the Submissive Myth.

To oppose the Dominant Myth, our Underground Man subconsciously seeks out those of similar mindset, others oppressed by the current reality, to comprise this idealistic society. At first the only evidence of such longing is the book’s narrative frame, in which the reader is treated as one of his fellow “Undefined” and has their thoughts anticipated in a way that best convinces them of his truth. It is only at the wit’s end where the Underground Man eventually finds a supposed equal: Liza. He recognizes the Dominant Myth’s decree in her, that she be “one of the truly unfortunate ones” because her oppression “all comes mainly from poverty,” and becomes attracted to her in both the

physical sense and as a companion of similar straits (Dostoevsky, *Notes* 88). His eagerness blinds him to the truth for a while, until he realizes that she is not “Undefined” as he thought she was. Her submission to Dominant Myth eventually tempts him to consciously throw her acceptance away through verbal abuse:

For a long time already I’d sensed that I had turned her whole soul over and broken her heart and the more convinced of it I was, the more I wished to reach my goal more quickly and as forcefully as possible. It was the game, the game that fascinated me; not just the game, however... (Dostoevsky, *Notes* 95)

It is not *her* acceptance he wants, for she is content being isolated and demeaned as long as she is with someone possessing compatible oppression. She accepts her circumstances and remains inactive, abandoning any hope for resentment that can be aimed beyond individuals. The Underground Man therefore drives her off because she is not an Underground Woman, existing outside of society, but accepts her situation trapped in the lowest circle prescribed of Dominant Myth surrounding prostitutes and debtors. She fulfills his fantasy, but is deemed empty, not based in her individual character, but because she has submitted to oppression. “One circumstance tormented [him] then: namely, that no one else was like [him], and [he] was like no one else. ‘I am one, and they are all,’ thought [he], and – [he’d] fall to thinking,” and, by thinking, he would isolate himself further (Dostoevsky, *Notes* 43).

To reiterate, myth is not “an object, concept, or idea” (Barthes, “Myth Today” 2). By thinking about it and defining it, the Underground Man is able to take the Dominant Myth out of its element – a subconscious collective understanding of language within a culture – and steal its power for his own definitions. Liza proves that it is possible for the

Underground Man to be content in the reality he hates, which forces a passionately adverse and paradoxical reaction when he becomes self-conscious of the fact; even the Underground Man is “amazed at [his] yesterday’s *sentimentality* with Liza” (Dostoevsky, *Notes* 98). “It fuels his cynical ‘game’ with her; one which ends with him taking out on her all the humiliations he has experienced. Disillusioned in his idealism, the Underground Man...turns on others with a terrible vengeance” (Jackson, *Dialogues* 220). After this personal revolution, a new reality is revealed: the Underground Man acts upon his own Dominant Myth, and passes judgmental titles upon Liza in order to define his social power. He superficially grants himself the power relegated to society. Disallowed from joining the so-called “insects,” the Underground Man’s outrage is purely emotional; overwhelmed by feelings of loneliness, he lashes out with the self-righteous authority of society against Liza as an individual, though his target is really the Dominant Myth of rational thought she is not willing to discard. “The central fact of rationalism...is its inevitable violation of the individual” by reducing humanity to components of a social machine (Jackson, *Dostoevsky’s* 51). This includes the paradoxical idea that he could be happy with Liza while also being oppressed by society; despite having lamented against his ostracization for so long, he chooses that ostracization over possible contentment in human connection.

Contentment is the target of the Underground Man’s definitive subversion; as long as titles exist, taking power away from individuals, isolating them from social fulfillment and imbuing them with feelings of loneliness, then there can be no contentment. Even if a person feels happy at that time, the truth is that what they feel is a refraction of reality, not a reflection, so that they might readily swallow the Dominant

Myth and its preferred social structures. The Underground Man refuses to swallow that pill, no matter how sweet it tastes or how closely it resembles his fantasies, because he knows it will never be real so long as the Dominant Myths of the current system remain in place. This is the Underground Man's personal revolution; this is where social upheaval begins.

5. *THE IDIOT* AND REJECTION

Myth is, above all else, a social structure. While it must be classified on the individual, personal level – and often subconsciously – it must move into dialogical culture to become a fully-fledged myth. It must, essentially, move beyond the Underground Man and into the Underground itself, connecting all of the tunnels until a sort of ideologically based pseudo-culture is born, not connected through ideas, or race, or class (though these might be influencers), but through principles. The Underground Man had a chance at this with Liza, and failed miserably. But now, with the introduction of our new protagonist in *The Idiot* (1869), the language becomes a social dialogue, not an internal monologue. Bakhtin explains the importance of the dialogic: “They are prepared for by the plot, but their culminating points – the peaks of the dialogues – rise above the plot in the abstract sphere of pure relationship, one person to another” (265). This abstract sphere, formed by dialogues between multi-faceted individuals engaged with their perceptions of reality, is the mythology coming into form:

The object is precisely the passing of a theme through many and various voices, its rigorous and, so to speak, irrevocable multi-voicedness and vari-voicedness.

The very distribution of voices and their interaction is what matters to

Dostoevsky. (Bakhtin, *Problems* 265)

The strength of a myth is dependent on the types of people who engage with it, the prevalence and power of its implications in their emotion, and, most of all, how it influences individuals in their dialogic interactions with other individuals. Myth is not shaped by accident, but by subconscious agreement on a given of reality.

The Revolution sought by the Underground Man, though grounded in individualism, is brought to fruition with the creation of a similar social structure to the kind he condemns, albeit different in that it does not reject his kind. In Dostoevsky's narrative, the Underground Man is the lone representative of mythical oppression; no other perspective is allowed, no other perspective is shared, in order that proper isolated resentment might be laid as the foundation for revolution. His is a resentment reflected in Dostoevsky himself, which he "gained in prison – a remarkable breadth of tragic vision and a painful new understanding of the violent, irrepressible human impulse toward self-expression" (Robinson 7). However, the resemblance between Dostoevsky and his Underground Man is only in feeling, hardly in ideology, and he leaves this resentful, self-injected voice behind in *The Idiot*. Dostoevsky uses *The Idiot* to illustrate action rather than thought with Prince Lev Nikolayevich Myshkin as our new protagonist, whose "peculiarity" is that he "is almost a spectator...stepped into a complex underground intrigue," where he "allows himself to be drawn into it, but without altering his onlooker's attitude" (Rosenberg vii). He is isolated, but not quite in the same way as the Underground Man; he seeks societal acceptance with love rather than resentment but is rejected because the Submissive Myth is already in transition. The contacts and relations he finds amongst Underground Men who have found their way aboveground now consider him an incurable idiot, partly because of his occasional epileptic seizures, partly because it is the title deigned upon him by the power of his physician, and partly because of his idealism, benevolence, and saint-like adherence to a bygone Dominant Myth. That is, the Dominant Myth that one should treat their neighbors with respect, dignity, and honesty. Their social sphere is completely opposed to his existence, populated by "a cast

of garrulous types, who amble about in episodes instigated by greed, ambition, conventionality, desperation and sheer love of absurdity and troublemaking” (Rosenberg vii). In conversation with such people, our protagonist “was preoccupied, in fact extremely preoccupied, almost perturbed, and even behaved quite strangely: sometimes he would seem to be attentive without hearing, then observant without noticing anything, and sometimes he would laugh without the least idea of what he was laughing about” (Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* 28-29). Prince Myshkin of *The Idiot* has become our new isolated mind, our new Underground Man, but he has been so cast against his own volition or consciousness.

At least, one might think that at first. The most obvious indicator is his irreverence for titles; Myshkin is born with the title of “Prince,” but he regards it only as a right to familial inheritance, not to any seat in the social hierarchy, and is rather humble about it. This recognition of the arbitrariness in titles, and therefore the powerlessness of nobility, is the only similarity between his Dominant Myth and the Submissive Myth that surrounds him. Furthermore, nobility is stripped even further of their power in *The Idiot* because nobles are hardly present in the novel, and then in a passive sense; this story focuses on the struggles of the middle class, specifically the impact of societal expectations on the family, comprised of discontented proletariats and in-betweens rather than active government officials and nobility. Any wealth or power granted to characters in this novel, specifically the impulsive ruffian Rogozhin and the centerpiece of his tragedy, Nastassya Filippovna, is self-destructive under the reign of the rising Submissive Myth: that a person must use others or be used. While Myshkin’s isolation at the hands of these forces is all too evident, he does not seek to break free of his position within the

Submissive Myth on any other account, which was the sole obsession of his predecessor. The Underground Man, whom we might consider sociopathic, was inclined by nature to rebel against the Dominant Myth, not for societal transformation, but for his own fulfillment. But Prince Myshkin is accommodating to the system, not intent on subverting dominant myth but rather showing how old conservative myths, practices of humanitarianism, religion, and honest brotherhood, prevail in the face of the rest. This self-assurance leaves Prince Myshkin vulnerable when his honor concerning Natassya is mistrusted by his romantic interest, Agalya:

The prince however was not troubled by anything and continued to be blissfully happy. Oh, of course, he too occasionally noticed a gloomy and impatient look in Agalya's eyes, but he believed more strongly that it was something else and the gloom disappeared of itself. Once he had put his faith in something, nothing could sway him. Perhaps he was a little too complacent. (Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* 537)

His idiocy is not stupidity, but neglectful ignorance of any reality but his own Dominant Myth, imbuing the Submissive Myth with power by simply not opposing it. He is complacent by allowing the frustration of Underground Men to germinate as they realize they can neither oppose nor infect him. No matter the position, Dominant or Submissive, the static myth leaves its adherents in jeopardy.

Myshkin is a reflection of Dostoevsky's anti-Socialism. He "wanted, in Myshkin, to portray a 'positively beautiful' and Christlike man", the complete contrary to the skeptical and unforgiving society rising from the depths of Submissive Myth's underground (Knapp 191). The conundrum is that the Prince never truly belongs to the Dominant Myth; he is not of the Ignoble Noble stock, too pure to intentionally oppress

his neighbor. But, because he believes in a part (virtue and good will), he is associated with the whole, for myth deals solely in binaries when introduced to public action. Dostoevsky is not interested in deconstructing their mythical struggle, but in human experience where “‘humans are transformed not from *external* reasons, but only from *moral* changes’” (Lantz 404). Against all expectations, Dostoevsky’s vessel for Christian brotherhood and self-sacrifice, his personal Dominant Myth and primary terministic screen, collapses in its struggle to survive under the Socialism of Submissive Myth. The benevolent Prince is destroyed at the novel’s conclusion; he is “once again in Schneider’s Swiss clinic,” receiving the treatment he had just left at the beginning of the novel, but now for more than epilepsy since he “understood nothing of what they were asking him and he did not recognize the people who had come in and were standing around him” (Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* 630, 628). He has become, not only isolated from consolidating with the Submissive Myth by its practitioners, but is now unable to physically interact with humanity itself since his rationality has been redefined as irrational. It was his faith in humanity, his trust and forgiveness applied to Roghozin, a man who had already admitted to wanting to kill him once and had stalked him ever since, that leads to his eventual breakdown. Roghozin, after trying to kill Prince Myshkin a second time and ultimately failing to bring himself to commit the act, nevertheless destroys Myshkin’s meaning indirectly, the last hope for Dominant Myth’s salvation kept alive by his own holy, self-sacrificing myth. The title of idiot, which society had insisted bestowing upon him in relation to their Subversive Myths and not in relation to the word’s definition, now fits the capabilities and limitations of the Prince’s mind when he is forced to understand the paradoxical hopelessness this Submissive Myth brings to its new reality by

oppressing the Dominant Myth that once kept it underground. By redefining of the moral, good, rational man into a hopeless, helpless idiot, the next step in the upheaval of social construction and Dominant Myth is underway: Rejection. The action fueled by resentment of the Dominant Myth is the public rejection of, not merely the myth, but those on the side of the Dominant Myth. Thus, Myshkin, because of his title and because of his nature, is redefined as an “idiot” and silenced.

Prince Myshkin is relegated another title in his society, unspoken here but frequently used in literary studies: the Holy Fool. He is a fool because, out of innocent optimism, he expects to live according to his mythical lifestyle, one that has been long displaced by common materialistic society’s Subversive Myth; those whom he walks among live so contrarily to his values that they call him an idiot in turn. Nowhere is this most prevalent than in his proposal to Natassya Filippovna, who seeks utter despair since rumors of scandalous behavior have already brought her and her family dishonor, depriving her of any stable position in the dominant myth. Before his proposal, at her birthday party, Natassya announces her plan to foil her family’s attempts to clean their name by marrying her off to Gavril Ivolgin. Instead, she allows Roghozin to marry her for a hundred thousand roubles, which he inherited just that morning. However, this entire scene is her attempt to subvert the Dominant Myth in a fit of nihilistic fever. The Prince takes pity on her, and proposes marriage:

’I told you before I would take your consent as an honor, and that you are doing me an honor, I am not doing you one. You smiled at those words, and I heard people around us laughing. Perhaps I expressed myself very comically...but I thought all along that I – understood the meaning of honor, and I’m certain I

spoke the truth. Just now you wanted to ruin yourself...but you are not to blame for anything. Your life must not be utterly ruined...I will respect you as long as I live.' (Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* 189)

The immediate replies from onlookers are, again, paradoxical: “‘What a good man he is!’” and “‘A cultivated man...but doomed!’” (Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* 189). The Socialist society recognizes just how good and selfless Myshkin is, but he still acts in defiance of their definitions determining what is considered logical action in an environment of oppression from all corners. The title of idiocy they bestow upon him is one steeped in Submissive Myth, Darwinian in nature as we would recognize it: whosoever acts without regard first and foremost for his own benefit is destined for ruin. It is a myth that affirms innate human instinct, while denouncing the foundational suggestion of acting for the good and charity of fellow human beings that took centuries to become a tentpole in civilized society. Their Submissive Myth suggests that self-preservation is always required, even in moments when taking a personal risk would cost us little. By dubbing Prince Myshkin an idiot, the residents of St. Petersburg have reached a vocalized agreement upon a recognized myth, and determined the Prince to be on the other side of that myth. Regardless of whether Dominant or Submissive, the binary they struggle over – typically a subconscious societal structure – has now moved from an idea manifesting itself through feelings of frustration towards oppression and disdain for people of certain affiliations, into the realm of language: the second phase of mythical metamorphosis. Resentment now has a voice, and that voice becomes many under the banner of Submissive Myth to reject Dominant Myth.

Dissenting or naïve voices like Prince Myshkin's, though they believe in two vastly different myths, are silenced by repressing polyphony. Polyphony is a musical term, referring to "the simultaneous combination of two or more tones or melodic lines" (DeVoto). In linguistic and literary terms, this is the equal combination of individual voices that, more or less, fit neatly together in the same structure. Bakhtin reads Dostoevsky as an author of the polyphonic novel, utilizing "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices" that do not focus upon the interpretation of a "single authorial consciousness," but instead form "a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 27-28). While *Notes From Underground* is the obvious exception, the Underground Man being unable to attain harmony with other voices, *The Idiot* achieves pluralistic consciousness and shows it in action. Its characters differ in motivation and power, but they all subscribe to the nihilistic socialism purported by that Submissive Myth: titles are meaningless, worth is found in material possession, the weak will be destroyed by the strong, and every man is out to exploit you for his own gain and your oppression. However, the true issue at hand is what this polyphony is driving for, namely a subcategory of itself known as "homophony." Homophony "exists in its purest form when all the voices or parts move together, as in a texture of block chords" in music or in the cultural mechanism in Socialism (DeVoto). Interactions between Prince Myshkin's neighbors prove that they are the monophonic force, chaotic in action but harmonious in adherence to Submissive Myth. Only because of the clarity provided by its structure as a novel is it revealed how the pluralistic consciousness is so quick to invalidate "valid voices" with "equal rights" if they are not also striving for this

monophony. And only through homophony are the oppressed finally able to oppress their oppressors, by defining and rejecting the opposing homophony they believe they are subjected to – regardless if the voice belongs to an Ignoble Noble or an “idiot” like Prince Myshkin. The Prince does not subject himself to this struggle, and is therefore relegated the title of “idiot” in order to invalidate his voice and remove the power that dividing up the polyphony works so hard to achieve. The Prince knows the danger he faces by holding cacophonous opinions, and, as in one such instance in which he attempts to rationalize his idea of love to those who hold a different view of the matter, remarks, “You are all looking at me with such curiosity...that if I don’t satisfy it you might be angry with me” (Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* 87). He is aware, but his belief in the innate goodness of humanity, a bygone fancy, is as good as ignorance.

Amongst these former Underground Men, who have made themselves known aboveground through their rejection of one monophony for another, there arise occasional exceptions to strict adherence to the chosen myth. One such exception is represented by Natassya, who falls into a paradoxical fit of passion because she recognizes that reality can be made right without revolting against the Dominant Myth. But this cannot be done by changing the meaning of signs, for “the individual does not have the power to change a sign in any way once it has become established in the linguistic community” (Saussure 69). Instead, she must form her own myth in contrast – her own Submissive Myth. Natassya tells the Prince, “No one has ever talked to me like that before. They’ve always tried to bargain for me, and no decent man has ever asked to marry me” (Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* 190). This is in line with another Submissive Myth: that humankind is comprised of hypocrites and manipulators, specifically those with privilege. Her oppression has been

enforced by the Dominant Myth surrounding marriage and its purity; she cannot possibly think of accepting Myshkin's proposal, even when she might find contentment in his alien kindness. Instead, she proclaims to her social circle, "You didn't really think I'd ruin a child like that?" and rejects Prince Myshkin's proposal, proclaiming with wild abandon:

'I'm a shameless person myself. I was Totsky's concubine...You've only got one choice - disreputable women or reputable women! Otherwise you get into a hopeless mess...You called me perfection just now; a fine perfection who goes into the streets just so as to boast of having trampled on a million roubles and a princess's title! What kind of wife would I make you after that?...But right now I want to have a good time, I'm a girl who belongs in the streets!' (Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* 190-191)

She then makes the regretful decision of running off with Roghozin towards the ruin she expected. Natassya remains stubbornly mired in self-destructive rejection, because the myth has moved from the subconscious into language. Myths no longer remain abstractions to side with or side against, but have transformed into identifiers once pulled out of their subconscious element. If she were to reject the Dominant Myth, she would only be rejecting the Prince and the "foolishness" he stands for. If she were to reject the Submissive Myth, she would be rejecting her own existence, because all that she identifies herself as, her very being, is determined by her understanding between "reputable women" and "disreputable women." Natassya rejects the Dominant Myth that marriage to the Prince will lead to security and a feeling of worth, rejects the Prince's myth that marriage will bring emotional fulfillment and a sense of acceptance, and fully

embraces the resentment that enables her to reject, though with devastating results, any myth that tries to tell her she is something other than what she has submitted herself to be.

Natassya, knowing full well that she decided against her own happiness in siding with the Submissive Myth, does all she can to prevent the Prince from finding contentment beyond the struggle between Dominant and Submissive Myth with Agalya Epanchin. Throughout the novel, Prince Myshkin is torn between his love for the two, and Agalya vents her frustration on him, unable to understand his attachment to Natassya. She wants to use him to escape the grip of the Dominant Myth in a different sense than Natassya, having been born into the upper class in the family of a general; she aims to escape the social constraints and useless falsity of nobility:

‘I don’t want to quarrel with my sisters, but I told Mother and Father long ago that I want to change my social position. I have decided to devote myself to teaching, and I’ve been counting on you because you said you liked children. Could we perhaps take up teaching together...We would be doing something useful together.’ (Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* 448-449)

Agalya wishes to withdraw to the individual level from which the Prince came and renew her origin, not in resentment, but in purposeful application. Her chosen definition of marriage as a charge towards usefulness and truth pursued by two individuals joined as one is another Submissive Myth, but one not tied up in the struggling binary comprised of disgrace against social ascension. It is her own, not reinforced by social acceptance, and so she threatens “‘If you don’t agree to it, I’ll marry Gavril Ardalionovitch. I don’t want be looked on as a horrid female at home and be accused of heaven knows what””

(Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* 449). In other words, if Prince Myshkin does not reinforce her Submissive Myth, she will abandon it and conform to the Dominant Myth's definition of marriage as a tool for social and financial security. Myshkin cannot understand her desires, because his definition of reality has been tainted by pity for Natassya Filippovna; that, though both Natassya and Agalya are oppressed by the Dominant Myth, Natassya's choice to defy it is more worthy of pity (and consequently love) than Agalya's attempts to escape and exist beyond it. Agalya sees how Natassya uses her association with Submissive Myth as a weapon:

‘I felt sorry for him because he is a man of such simple spirit and who in his simplicity believed he could be happy with a woman of – such a character...you were unable to love him, you tormented him, and then you gave him up...You couldn't love him, a simple-hearted man, and you probably secretly despised him and laughed at him, you can love nothing but your own shame and the incessant thought that you have been abused, and dishonored.’ (Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* 584)

And, yet, even though the Prince is present for this clear truth, Natassya retains power over his understanding of myth as “Agalya was completely carried away in a single moment...she could not resist the terrible joy of revenge” for Natassya's manipulation of both her and the Prince. But her antagonism towards Natassya reaches a peak when she is called an “idle woman,” a characteristic of the noble Dominant Myth she is trying to escape, and becomes associated with its oppression when her self-righteous anger is contrasted with Natassya's calm serenity. “How dare you speak to me like this?” she said with indescribable haughtiness in reply to Natassya Filippovna's remark” (Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* 586). Natassya has gained full power over the Prince by showing him that it is

indeed a singular struggle between the Dominant and Submissive Myth, and that he must choose to side with the oppressed or the oppressor:

‘I am ready to forgive you – in view of your position – though I did think better of you...Well, take your treasure – here he is looking at you, quite dazed...But if you like I’ll *order* him at once – do you hear? – I have only to order him and he’ll give you up immediately and stay with me forever and marry me, and you will run along home alone!’ (Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* 587)

Natassya has won power over Agalya and Prince Myshkin because she has convinced them that their understanding of love is not more powerful than the mythology that surrounds them all. By family, Agalya is bound to the Dominant Myth, and Natassya cannot allow her to escape that constraint or else she loses the power she has over Prince Myshkin, through his pity for her rejection. By contrasting herself as unworthily confined to unhappiness by the Dominant Myth, Natassya successfully defines Agalya into the role of oppressor, and pulls Prince Myshkin into the unhappiness of rejection that will soon condemn him to madness yet again. In her plight and resignification against an oppressive society, Natassya has become an oppressor herself.

The necessity for Prince Myshkin’s inevitable collapse back into idiocy, his subjection but not subjugation to the rising Submissive Myth, is immediately reflected in Dostoevsky’s pessimism for Russia’s future. “Dostoevsky often expressed exaggerated hopes for his homeland in his correspondence, yet in the honesty of his art, where time must have its own reality, those hopes were transmuted into tragic insight” (Knapp 173). He cannot condemn the Submissive Myth as being wrong in its plight, for the raw human emotion behind its honest criticism and the reasonable cynicism it harbors against

Dominant Myth's authority have clear, straightforward motivations. But he also cannot agree with the outcomes of a society formed from Underground Men, who only know and keep company with those they have gathered underground. Dostoevsky has no faith in the morals of a system run by godless people, but likewise sees no success for people like Myshkin, rejected and oppressed by the Submissive Myth for "traits that remind us of the early Christians who modeled their lives on Jesus' breaking with family and living at odds with the state" (Knapp 193). The struggle here is not to argue the conflicts between Christian and Socialist norms, two myth-makers both linked yet opposed, but to depict the erasure of a man's meaning. Those who fashion their identity with any myth have placed the construction of their identity into an external power – the power of individual resignification now lies in the Submissive Myth's struggle for power over the Dominant Myth, to oppress the oppressors or henceforth remain oppressed. Such a seemingly collateral sacrifice to society is worthy of titles like "holy fool" and "idiot," for they set themselves up for rejection by positioning themselves as buffers against ideological bullets, shells fired between Dominant and Submissive Myths against societal structures. The Submissive Myth in revolution is oppressive, for it relegates reality into a binary – Dominant against Submissive – for the sake of its existence, and the natural polyphony is abandoned for as long as it is unconventional. Whether or not the Submissive Myth is just in this reduction is not a pursuit aligned with the purpose of this paper – it is simply the natural state of mythical revolution.

6. DEMONS AND REVOLUTION

Notes From Underground saw the fiery resentment of the individual isolated by Dominant Myth, and how he identifies himself as oppressed. By defining himself against it as part of his own Submissive Myth, he appears to obtain control over making his own meaning in a reality that refuses to recognize the validity or power of an opposing ethical stance (ethical meaning a system of thinking that ultimately determines value). *The Idiot* showed the transition of myth into ideas as the definer acts upon (or rather for) their Submissive Myth, and how multiple definers band together under one myth to demand and eventually seize power. Consciously, unconsciously, or subconsciously, opposing voices are drowned out as the ideas attach themselves to personal action. Dostoevsky's final work in my template for mythical transition, *Demons* "conveyed his sense of the menace and the absurdity of the revolutionary socialist movement as he saw it," in which "one-tenth of humanity would have personal freedom and unlimited power over the other nine-tenths; the latter would lose their individuality" (Lantz 404-405). *Demons* is the boiling point of mythical oppression, in which resentment is the motivation and rejection is finding solidarity in other Underground Men – what began as a concept in the individual sphere and found its voice in the social sphere is now converted into action in the political sphere. Once it becomes clear that righteous fury is not satisfying enough, and association not powerful enough, practitioners of the Submissive Myth determine that their new ideas and ideologies must replace the old ones if they are to receive social recognition and validation. Hence, the third and final step in mythical metamorphosis: revolution.

Demons (1872) is a culmination of all Dominant and Submissive Myths Dostoevsky loathes, and how they fraternize with each other one night to slit each other's throats the next – sometimes literally, as in this novel. This novel is more dramatic than *Notes from Underground* and *The Idiot* in its framing of open, unabashed conflict between myths. Characters' ideologies manifest through action rather than through expostulation, and are set in motion with intended consequences that capitulate in the burning of Moscow by revolutionaries. The entire fictional society is based on Dostoevsky's perception of his current society on the tipping point of tumultuous change. Not the Bolshevik revolution specifically, but the novel might be seen as a model, a precursor – fictionalized turmoil meant to warn against the violently radical movements of 1869. The purpose of the turmoil is self-oriented social consolidation, "to find one's own voice and to orient it among other voices, to combine it with some and to oppose it to others, to separate one's voice from another voice with which it has inseparably merged" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 239). The status of the thinking being, whether that be an individual or a collective consciousness, never changes – it simply reorients and rearranges itself. While still as polyphonic as *The Idiot*'s, the narrative in *Demons* can be reduced to a binary represented by father and son: Stepan Verkhovensky, in his decaying upper-class society, and Pyotr Verkhovensky, in his secret revolutionary society (literally called "The Society"). By this point, though, Dostoevsky has resigned himself of humanity being primary agent in any of these fields; instead, it is Subversive Myth that moves the individual, and none can escape a structure that has already been presupposed.

We begin *Demons* with Stepan Verkhovensky, washed up professor and author relying on handouts from the wealthy widow Varvara Petrovna, his personal connection

to the dominant elite class where the ideas he propagates are appreciated. Stepan is recalled by the narrator as a man who “constantly played a certain special and, so to speak, civic role among us, and loved this role to the point of passion – so much that it seems...he would have been unable to live without it” (Dostoevsky, *Demons* 7). His self-appointed “civic role” is to unwittingly be the vocal piece of the Dominant Myth; Stepan, in all his proselytizing, identifies with the side that oppresses the Russian working class. He is the personification lampooned by the Underground Man, and looked down upon by his own social caches, yet still asserts superiority over the peasant class. He says of them, “We, being hasty people, were in too great a hurry with our dear little peasants...We brought them into fashion, and for several years in a row the whole literary sector fussed over them as over some newly discovered treasure. We placed laurels upon lousy heads” (Dostoevsky, *Demons* 35). It is not necessarily the neglect that Stepan attributes to the Russian peasant that can be considered the oppressive Dominant Myth, but the very fact that the peasant is to be treated as a subject that must be defined outside of its own power. Indeed, even “Liputin,” another fellow of the Dominant class, “agreed at once, but observed that for the moment it was still necessary to play the hypocrite and praise peasants for the sake of the trend; that even high-society ladies...wrote from Paris to their managers in Russia that henceforth they were to treat the peasants with all possible humaneness” (Dostoevsky, *Demons* 35).

Stepan is the lesser epitome of the “Ignoble Noble,” not manipulating those lower classes with his power, but subjugating them to mere subjects definable by the language of the upper class. Yet, Stepan only clings to people with titles under the illusion that those titles rub off on him as reward for echoing and poeticizing what they believe to be

the proper ethic. His widow patron, Varvara Petrovna, encourages Stepan's "gifts" while insisting their failure will not affect his indulging in their rewards and obsession with being a pedagogue. Dostoevsky therefore provides for us "a situation (a) in which the participants are potentially emotionally unstable and (b) in which therefore a rather smaller than usual quota of elements deviating from the prevailing norm of social decorum needs to be introduced to bring about instability – especially if it comes as a surprise" (Jones 98). Stepan, in his unaware contentment with his performance of Dominant Myth, sets himself up for scandal that would undermine the very reality he worships:

Where [scandal] breaks out spontaneously, the result will be to relativize conventions of social conduct and radically confuse people about where they stand in relation to each other...[with] the threat of bringing into the open and exposing to critical judgment sometimes secret but always intensely serious desires of crucial importance to the subject which often cannot be aired publicly without embarrassment or worse, and alternatively taking them seriously and trivializing or discounting them. (Jones 97)

This destroys Stepan so thoroughly because of his identity as a writer and teacher; his entire meaning and social position is derived from his vocal position – his dialogue with society. Yet, he posits himself in an inflexible situation between myth and the individual, because language, especially that translated to "literature" and considered determined reality, "can only connote reality, not denote it," and thereby is "deprived of all transitivity, forever doomed to signify itself just when it wants to signify only the world" (Barthes, *Critical* 267). Stepan deceives himself into thinking that he has earned his position to be

part of the class that takes stock in the Dominant Myth he preaches, and that his myth is the only true reality. But this kind of singular thinking not only leaves the nobility vulnerable to an evident and avoidable revolution, but even hastens the fuse by encouraging the indignant surprise of opposition.

Said indignant surprise is incited by Pyotr, Stepan's abandoned son who speaks indirectly and "by his silence in some cases and his hints in others, contributed to the rooting of...strange idea[s]" (Dostoevsky, *Demons* 345). Stepan and Pyotr have an estranged relationship, as Stepan's estate "had belonged to his first wife, and so now to their son...Stepan Trofimovich was merely the trustee...[sending] a thousand roubles a year from the estate...However, the entire thousand was sent by Varvara Petrovna, and Stepan Trofimovich did not contribute a single rouble to it. On the contrary, he pocketed the income from this bit of land, and, furthermore, ruined it altogether by leasing it...[and] selling the timber that was its main valuable asset" (Dostoevsky 75). When Pyotr first arrives on the scene to collect his squandered fortune, he ridicules the noble Stepan, who had ostracized him from shame, by unveiling rather embarrassing details about a marriage his father wished to escape, and wrote to him in secrecy that he needs to be "'saved'" and that Pyotr is "at [his] service" (Dostoevsky, *Demons* 198-199). Such is the subjugated relationship between the Dominant and Submissive Myths; by treating the Submissive Myth as invalid on its own, as Pyotr is treated in his rights as compared to Stepan's needs, the Submissive Myth's power is defined by the Dominant Myth. It is a fledgling, disallowed from developing meaning on its own. The Dominant does not quite understand the paradox of resentment and conformity inherent to the Submissive, which allows their imminent rejection to grow in power through careful calculation, and

conjugates the birth of the Underground Man. “At the centre of it all is this old problem which we have followed through from the beginning: the balance between ideal self-image and the confirming or disconfirming views of others, and the ease with which this balance can be disrupted” (Jones 112). Pyotr is that disruptor through his being “connected with everything revolutionary in Russia,” at least in the mind of his band of Underground Men; this reputation’s primary objective is to subvert his father’s honor in the presence of Varvara Petrovna, though his reliance on her was already dishonorable. Pyotr, by arriving unexpectedly, brings the shame his father was trying to avoid into tangible reality, thus making his own meaning and subverting the power that Stepan tried to exact over him, both financially and socially. It is for the subjugation of his rights over the estate – a completely personal reason – that Pyotr becomes a peddler of chaos. His dialogue – born from a destructive place while promising reconstruction – rationalizes murder and burning Moscow in the name of ideology. It is a social movement, but it is born from somewhere personal, defined internally and represented externally in the clash of myths that is, to Pyotr, an attempt to regain the power he lost to his father.

Pyotr Stepanovich Verkhovensky is the Underground Man with purpose. Instead of isolating himself with his thoughts and grievances, Pyotr undermines the systems through his gathering together of “The Society,” and instructing them in ways to distribute pamphlets that perpetuate the Submissive Myth. However, the pamphlets are of little effect but causing difficulty for the factory within which they are distributed, for “tracts are an empty affair of themselves, and in my opinion not at all worrisome. As if we haven’t seen enough of them. Besides, these were not even new tracts: exactly the same ones, it was said later, had been spread recently” (Dostoevsky, *Demons* 346).

Subsequently halted and ignored in the distribution of information, which creates an open environment of despair and oppression, Pyotr then directs the burning of their town, Zarechye, on the night of a prestigious Carneval thrown by one of the nobility who sympathizes with his plight, Yulia Mikhailovna. Pyotr flees when these actions for the sake of the Submissive Myth reach their head to punish Yulia's nobility, leaving the individuals of "The Society" to the police after he was done "playing with them like pawns," and attempts to start a new revolution elsewhere (Dostoevsky, *Demons* 551). And, when questioned, the political purpose of these Underground Men is made clear through one of his captured associates, Lyamshim:

To the question of why so many murders, scandals, and abominations had been perpetrated, he replied with burning haste that it was all 'for the systematic shaking of the foundations, for the systematic corrupting of society and all principles; in order to dishearten everyone and make a hash of everything, and society being thus loosened, ailing and limp, cynical and unbelieving, but with an infinite yearning for some guiding idea and for self-preservation – to take it suddenly into their hands, raising the banner of rebellion.' (Dostoevsky, *Demons* 670)

While the method and manner of societal revolution does not require fire and murder, it does require that the rest of society be pulled into an environment fit for rejecting the Dominant Myth – the same power Natassya exerted over Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot*, but on a grander scale. The primary actors, those that move society towards this mindset of rejection to prepare for revolution, always do so for the sake of defining individual purpose. The Underground Man moved from the individual sphere to the social and now

to the political, but his original motivator in seeking individual purpose from resentment remains intact. Myth never erases what came before, only deflecting other meanings; it is not unfathomable that, in striving for social transformation, revolution does all it can to deflect the place of the individual defining their own purpose by the very act of participating in this metamorphosis. Pyotr is the extreme embodiment of this individual revolution, for his actions are not on behalf of the good of the people, or even towards overthrowing the current Dominant Myth. His purpose is to stoke the flames of discontent, creating the perfect environment in which adherents to the Submissive Myth would violently revolt against their oppressors. But the goal is to keep the fire burning, for his identity as an individual is not defined through societal reform, but rather through the very action of revolution itself. Submissive Myth is abandoned in its original intent, leaving definition open for those betrayed in “The Society” to begin resentment of their own grievances and leading it against their former Dominant Myth, which has already been subverted.

The Dominant Myth over Pyotr and the Russian peasants’ Submissive Myth have denied their polyphony, enforcing a monophony. To overcome this and assert themselves as the new Dominant Myth, the revolutionaries in *Demons* fight back through humiliation, oppression, and violence towards those siding with their oppressors. Stepan, representing the newfound emptiness of the Dominant Myth as its power is on the way out, cannot understand why his society is being ruined by the frustration of the oppressed:

‘Was it not I, was it not I who just declared that the enthusiasm of the younger generation is as pure and bright as it ever was, and that it is perishing only for being mistaken about the forms of the beautiful? Is that not enough for you? And

if you take it that this was proclaimed by a crushed, insulted father, how then – oh, you short ones – how then is it possible to stand higher in impartiality and tranquility of vision?...Ungrateful...unjust...why, why do you not want to make peace!’ (Dostoevsky, *Demons* 486)

Stepan, though full of empty-headed folly as a lesser power in the structure of the Dominant Myth surrounding nobility, tries to explain in a one-time role as Dostoevsky’s mouthpiece how nihilistic and cyclical the destruction is. But it is only because his identity, the beliefs about society that constructed his reality, are being laid waste; he is being cut out of the dialogue because he refused to listen and respond to the Submissive Myth. But, perhaps, as Paulo Freire might suggest, this could be intentional: “The oppressor knows full well that this intervention would not be to his interest. What is his interest is for the people to continue in a state of submersion, impotent in the face of oppressive reality” (52). Stepan brought his son’s “disgraceful” revolt upon his own head because he refused to confront him, out of either shameful denial or a wish to hold onto his undeserved power.

Stepan defines his purpose by exerting his noble power over his son as one of the intellectual replete; Pyotr defines his purpose in the action of revolting against that power. Both act on their own truths, and so demonstrate Dostoevsky’s belief in the wilful ignorance of the Dominant Myth, and the reckless obsession of the Submissive Myth. Once revolutionaries achieve what they strive for, as Pyotr does, they will fail to implement it fully because they are determined, not to change the world, but to fulfill that purpose of mythical resignification. They will become complacent and confident that their meaning is fully defined, as did their predecessors. Yet, even after they have worked

their purpose, the narrator notes how the very act of violent revolution is still regarded as one of progress: “Now, three months later, our society has rested, relaxed, recovered, acquired its own opinion, so much so that some even regard Pyotr Stepanovich himself almost as a genius...others, on the contrary, do not deny him acuteness of abilities, but couple it with a total ignorance of reality” (Dostoevsky, *Demons* 486). We see here, the cycle is beginning again already.

Though actually directed by Dostoevsky as a pamphlet novel in defiance of radicals, it is difficult to discern in *Demons* which individuals are not oppressive in their interpretation and reaction to Dominant Myths; both sides are adamant in their defense of opposing perspectives. It is even harder to determine if they could have acted any differently and still escaped unscathed amidst a crumbling dialogue. But the cycle will always continue, because it is through conflict – of oppressing and being oppressed – that individuals define themselves and their purpose. This is the truth of the Subversive Myth.

7. THE SUBVERSIVE MYTH

Dostoevsky is a cultural, political, and psychological novelist: his focus is in defining human interaction, grounded in thematically-based characters that must prove the truth of their being against other truths. To Bakhtin, the diversity of these voices is not necessarily to argue one preferential philosophy on its own, but to show the inevitable connection of all these differences in forming the social mind:

A thought gravitates toward system as toward an ultimate whole; the system is put together out of separate thoughts, as out of elements. Dostoevsky's ideology knows neither the separate thought nor systemic unity in this sense. For him the ultimate indivisible unit is not the separate referentially bounded thought, not the proposition, not the assertion, but rather the integral point of view, the integral position of a personality...And thus the linking-up of thoughts is the linking-up of integral positions, the linking-up of personalities. (Bakhtin, *Problems* 93)

Dostoevsky's works are profoundly individualistic, in which a single man can represent an entire myth; such is the function of the Underground Man, Prince Myshkin, Natassya Filiponova, and Pyotr Stepanovich. Yet, every side character performs the same purpose as every main character, should we delve into further detail. Dostoevsky's novels are polyphonies in which the oppressors and the oppressed are not units of language or structure, but human beings. Human beings do not think in terms of Dominant and Submissive Myth, but rather in terms of oppressor and oppressed – much more personal and in conjunction with how Dostoevsky thinks. “What is characteristic of myth? To transform a meaning into form. In other words, myth is always a language-robbery” in which one meaning steals social power from the rest, consequently, whether violent or

not, relegating their definers to the position of the oppressed (Barthes, “Myth Today” 11). Unlike resentment and rejection, which are primarily psychological, revolution is always social action – a human expression that can be marked and documented in tangible reality. In his opus on the subject, pedagogical theorist Paulo Freire affirms how important revolution is by its individualistic beginning: humanization. “While humanization and dehumanization are real alternatives, only the first is the people’s vocation. This vocation is constantly negated, yet it is affirmed by that very negation” (43).

It is the Marxist banner that proposes, to best achieve individual change, one must participate in social change, which offers “something of a restorative of richness, complexity, and ‘human’ substance. Marx means by revolution a thorough-going change in modes of production, *together* with a thorough-going change of *men*: their ideas and relationships, their habits and pleasures, their institutions” (Le Baron 559). We saw how Stepan and his fellow intellectuals consider the lower classes objects to be studied and defined, specifically according to fads; that is because the peasant has been isolated from what is considered the social sphere, and so are hardly considered individuals with agency and ‘human’ substance. In that state, they were relegated on the radical fringe, or, worse yet, ridiculed as an invalid perspective. By revolting against the Dominant Myth, the Submissive Myth humanizes itself because now, in its action, it has achieved identity and power in opposition. Freire terms this sort of critical questioning “*conscientização*,” which, “by making it possible for people to enter the historical process as responsible Subjects...enrolls them in the search for self-affirmation and thus avoids fanaticism” (36).

But does self-affirmation truly avoid fanaticism? Mythical revolution is not the humanization of classes, tribes, or social groups, as scholars might believe; those revolutions exist on a systemically institutional level, and rely on the subjugation of believers for the propagation of a political stance. Rather, mythical revolution is a never-ending cycle in which the Dominant and Submissive Myths switch sides, but never stop their struggle for power over the other. A third layer of myth causes this perpetual motion – a law of rhetorical physics, if you permit the expression, which has yet to be defined. Therefore, I will define it with my own term: “Subversive Myth.” Unlike Dominant and Submissive Myths, which act on a linguistic level, Subversive Myth acts as a humanistic force. It is the “why” and “how” at the center of linguistic transition. Instead of thinking of Dominant and Submissive Myth on opposite sides of a linear scale, or on a binary plane, place them at the North and South ends of a wheel. Spinning the wheel places one myth at the top and the other at the bottom; the axis in the middle, upon which both spin and struggle for dominance, is the Subversive Myth. It is not subversive in nature because it subverts the system in which it acts (though it can) but because it is, by its very nature, subversive. Speaking in plainest terms, Subversive Myth dictates that social meaning is determined when the individual defines individual purpose through the process of resignification. It is not a mathematical structure, like signs or myth, but a simple scientific law that humanizes language beyond its position in forms. In fact, though it is a myth, it is a myth by definition of its place in mythology and semiology. At its core, the Subversive Myth is a human characteristic, the purest form of the motivated nature of the myth – it is a psychological quality inherent in us all, and rarely lacking the environment it needs to flourish and move us.

The Subversive Myth is not Submissive or Dominant because it is not social, but individual because it is personal; social action begins on the individual level as a choice, regardless of whether it is influenced by an external or internal force to pursue revolution. Yet, this almost guarantees that acting upon it, specifically. But Subversive Myth is not always ethical, nor is it necessarily necessary. This is because the Subversive Myth naturally arises strongest in those who would consider themselves oppressed. Those who are not able to be comfortable with themselves because they are not comfortable with their place in society manifests in the Subversive Myth, which is inherent in all critically thinking “men and women as beings in the process of *becoming* – as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality” (Freire 84). The Subversive Myth does not change, does not transform, but remains in place as a motivator – a call to social action inherent in those striving for a more complete reality within which they can fit according to their own design. Yet, individualistic revolution threatens to always be vulnerable. The new Submissive Myth could just as well be implemented through the polyphony of dialogic adults as it could be forcefully ousting the Dominant by a new order of violent children. However, the dialogic adult must always begin with the child, and so revolutions call for the direct action of those trying to move past their newness and into commonality.

One does not need to *be* oppressed to *feel* oppressed, as we learned from the internal monologue of the original Underground Man. Paulo Freire, however, has an idealistic view of revolutionary resignification when he asserts that social revolution remains social, and that any change in the individual is a reactive part of the greater, more influential whole: “Liberation is thus a childbirth, and a painful one. The man or woman

who emerges is a new person, viable only as the oppressor-oppressed contradiction is superseded by the humanization of all people” (49). But revolution is never about the humanization of all people, nor about the humanization of a group of people: it is about the humanization of *one* person over all – the self. The Underground Man, who must make his voice heard so that his identification within society is given the proper value, is a sectarian who, “as he revolves about ‘his’ truth, feels threatened if that truth is questioned. Thus, each considers anything that is not ‘his’ truth a lie” (Freire 39). The opposite of the sectarian, whom Freire favorably titles “the radical, committed to human liberation, does not become the prisoner of a ‘circle of certainty’ within which reality is also imprisoned. On the contrary, the more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can better transform it” (Freire 39). But language is a dialogue, always requiring independent voices involved in dependent construction; if a voice detaches itself from enforcing a myth, whether by principle or subconscious action, revolution is not occurring. This is the period of resentment, when the society is taken into account and oppressions are counted. One can keep an open mind at this stage, but to push towards the stage of rejection is to attempt to break the circle of certainty – only to join the circle of mythical transformation.

Oppression is the antagonistic quality of the Dominant Myth. It is why the revolution occurs, and what the Submissive Myth actively rebels against. “This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well” (Freire 44). If this is the aim of revolution, history rarely shows it – the priority is almost always to liberate the oppressed, because they are the actors who seek that revolution. We see it in the stage of rejection, when the people of Moscow

deride and dehumanize Prince Myshkin. “Almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or ‘sub-oppressors.’ The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped” (Freire 45). By virtue of the clear binary between these opposing worldviews, then, all who degrade Myshkin as an idiot or take advantage of him are in the wrong, and abusing the power dynamics they mean to tilt more towards their favor. The Stepan Verkhovensky who deny meaning for the oppressed and, by doing so, define the line between Dominant and Submissive Myth, are only asking for the Pyotrs of the world to question the validity of this hierarchy, and act upon their Subversive Myth so that they might humanize themselves and dehumanize their oppressors. The polyphony rejecting a monophony is destined to become a monophony in linguistic revolution, because they must do so to unify the vision and define their prescribed myth. Dominant Myth is usually complacent at the beginning of revolution, as it correctly sees the oppression of the Submissive Myth as a problem on the individualistic level, but fails to see the close relationship of the personal identity to the social identity. This is how Prince Myshkin is so often taken advantage of, his complacency at its peak when he resigns himself as unable to understand society:

Although the prince as usual assumed much of the blame and genuinely expected some punishment, he had been inwardly convinced from the first that Lizaveta Prokofyevna could not be seriously angry with him and was really more angry with herself. And so, such a long period of hostility had by the third day plunged him into the darkest perplexity. (Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* 320)

Any dissent, whether from a voice of privilege or poverty, is just another source of power feeding the Dominant Myth that oppresses. At least, that is the case in revolutionary times. Those outside of the Submissive Myth are immune to this discontent (there is no other name for it) because their voices have been defined in social reality, and thus define themselves on the individual level. But the Dominant Myth that human beings are social individuals defined by society, the same myth that lingered over the Underground Man, has remained in power, and so any individual action that one takes is considered a social action, and classifies them according to the side of the binary they may or may not consciously stand on.

Demons is, without much extraneous ideology or philosophizing, the pitting of the Dominant myth against the Submissive Myth in a revolutionary setting, and how the core of both is the Subversive Myth. At the end, when the flames clear, the Subversive Myth always wins, for it has made known its existence and power to individuals who, for a brief moment, are able to define themselves in society in ways that are deemed “culturally significant.” But for how long will this victory last, in the light of society’s unstoppable transitory nature under the power of ambiguous language and the thirst for constant purposeful drive? Freire outlines the end goal – the elimination of oppression – but the peace might be much more fleeting than he implies:

If the goal of the oppressed is to become fully human, they will not achieve their goal by merely reversing the terms of the contradiction, by simply changing poles....Resolution of the oppressor-oppressed contradiction indeed implies the disappearance of the oppressors as a dominant class...An act is oppressive only when it prevents people from being more human. Accordingly, these necessary

restraints do not *in themselves* signify that yesterday's oppressed have become today's oppressors. (Freire 56-57)

The Subversive Myth does not deny this but suggests it is an ideal. The very act of adhering to a myth is acting upon identity – the definition of what makes you, not just human, but you because “consciousness itself can arise and become a viable fact only in the material embodiment of signs” (Bakhtin, *Language* 51-52). However, for every myth that exists, there is another that denies it and presents a contradicting ethical system. That is not to say both are not right, and comprise a polyphonic objective reality, but for one myth to voice its specific subjective truth is to deflect the truth of the other myth. That is, to deny a facet of identity that forms a person's concept of themselves as human. In this sense, though power dynamics will dictate the repercussions of different types of oppression, all human beings are, at one time, both oppressors and oppressed. Mythical revolution merely dictates that the roles swap occasionally – historically, socially, and personally – but are never resolved. In this way, by acting upon the Subversive Myth, man is always involved in purposeful meaning-making with the world around him; as a price for that purpose, though, the dialogue between opposing meanings becomes a power struggle born from the same place. The Submissive Myth wants the Dominant Myth's power, and the Subversive Myth will ensure that neither side comes away satisfied. To stop the wheel would be to forfeit man's role as a social creature, and henceforth meaning must come under the relegation of one monophony.

Despite his adversity to the revolutionaries empowered by Subversive Myth, Dostoevsky “had great sympathy for idealistic youth who were drawn into the revolutionary movement by their powerful sense of social justice...but he insisted that

there could be no real love of one's fellow man without a belief in God and immortality" (Lantz 405). This might be the lingering sentimentalism from when "in Siberia Dostoyevsky came to see 'how much strength the human personality possesses to create the conditions under which it can survive amidst the worst adversity'" (Robinson 7). And, still, the pattern of the Subversive Myth is unstoppable because, despite the oppression of the Submissive Myth, "man is free. Without free self-determination...the word *tragic* cannot properly be used. 'Thus it comes about that Dostoevsky sets the real key-point of the tragic tangle in the realm of metaphysics; for only here we are allowed to premise the pure activity of the free will and have an insight into it through the prism of art'" (Jackson, *Dialogues* 262). It is the necessity of human expression to avoid nihilistic ends, and therefore weave this cycle time and time again to give its Underground Men a purpose. "The artistic representation of an idea is possible only when the idea is posed in terms beyond affirmation and repudiation, but at the same time not reduced to simple psychical experience deprived of any direct power to signify (Bakhtin, *Problems* 80). Society, given its flexibility of meaning and how it caves easily in the face of ambiguous outrage, is the perfect canvas for these artistically starved individuals looking to give their lives purpose. Revolution, then, begins with a feeling, moves to an idea, and ends in action. This is the same in the case of Subversive Myth, a myth that, for a period of time, must give up its own definition that defines it as something not existing in cognizant reality. The Dominant Myth, remaining reduced to that psychical experience, is helpless to fight back against the Subversive Myth's direct power to signify relative to itself. The Submissive Myth, meanwhile, loses its identity entirely, except as the newly-crowned

Dominant Myth that was once a revolutionary power in an age of oppression. It has, at that point, lost its identity in ending the revolutionary action.

8. CONCLUSION

Dostoevsky did not live to see the Bolshevik Revolution, but he predicted it – He did so by looking inward, towards the natural inclination of human beings as individuals defining their meaning socially, regardless of whether they defined themselves within the Dominant or Submissive Myth. In that brief temporary climate of overthrowing Dominant Myth, the Bolshevik Revolution saw individuals influenced by society, robbed of their definitions, capitulating towards a society influenced by individuals. Until, naturally, it reached a new state of Dominant Myth, and a different meaning-robbery became the common language. Such is the nature of the Subversive Myth as we followed it through *Notes From Underground*, *The Idiot*, and *Demons*, establishing a pattern of resentment, rejection, and revolution. This template of Barthes' linguistic mythology is uniform across time within the linguistic bubbles of respective cultures, because, although myths might be different, the biological nature of signs remains essentially the same – as is our nature to define ourselves with and through them.

Likewise in literature, for “that external world in which the characters of the story live and die is the *author's world*, an objective world vis-à-vis the consciousnesses of the characters” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 71). The novel is a microcosm of what occurs in culture, as the author simultaneously defines themselves and the novel through dialogic interactions. Social upheaval is not always guaranteed violence, as it was in the Bolshevik Revolution, but it most always will be because of its beginnings in personal conviction, and its roots in purposeful identity as we unearthed in *Notes From Underground*. As one perception of reality gains power and voice to defy the Dominant Myth in the social sphere as it did in *The Idiot*, many voices that might not necessarily be

opposed to this change, but have no attachment to the call to arms, will be drowned out by a polyphony calling for the greater good – or, at least, for the good of a greater understanding.

Yet, the wheel of mythical transition never stops when one revolution is accomplished, as was evident in *Demons*. The binary struggle between Dominant and Submissive Myth is the soul of Subversive Myth, which dictates that social meaning is determined when the individual defines purpose through the process of resignification. What are these purposes? They are never uniform, but always personal; the individual is never fully defined because individuals are constantly redefining society to define themselves, thus taking meaning from those who had reached a state of rest. In this way, there is always a perspective in some state of oppression. Dostoevsky unintentionally illustrated the purpose behind this constant by showing how revolution is rooted in emotional inclination to dialogue, where myth is predominantly at home in conflict. Recognizing Dominant and Submissive Myths as fluid in power dynamics, and Subversive Myth as a constant yet constantly malleable in form, we might understand how transferring myth to the plane of action is the structure behind chaotic upheaval in social understandings of language. Revolution, as Freire might suggest, is the natural state of the oppressed – the Subversive Myth suggests that man, in one way or another, as part of his human nature, is always both oppressing and being oppressed. He is always revolting, and being revolted against.

Just as a human is a being of language, so is society a being beholden to the power of signs, and likewise the signs of power. This mythical template is not relegated to the novel alone, but to all avenues of communication – its power is garnered through

signs, and signs are the proteins of language. Should this pattern be applied to other works of literature, critics might learn humanity's behavioral leanings before the fruits blossom; literature is a more predictable application, as the language is a frozen snapshot in time and textual meaning has few dimensions. Yet, there is a social aspect that the mythologists must distance themselves from, since "when a myth reaches an entire community, it is from the latter that the mythologist must become estranged if he wants to liberate the myth. Any myth with some degree of generality is in fact ambiguous, because it represents the very humanity of those who, having nothing, have borrowed it" (Barthes, "Myth Today" 22-23). But it is because of that lending that structures concerning Dominant, Submissive, and Subversive Myths can be applied to most social expression of language, from television to pedagogy, from journalism to social media. These forms of linguistic expression are not as consistent or unchanging, but they still act through the same stages as the novel. The revolutions, no matter how minute, are always there, and always at some stage within the three-step mythical transition template I proposed, because every human is in some capacity filled with the Subversive Myth. The Subversive Myth never stops turning the wheel, and, regardless of the consequence or goal proposed beneath one banner, is always engaged in resignification for revolution's sake. Now, whether or not such revolution proves to be necessary or effective, however, is depends on the individual, and the social action. But if that field of study can be defined or understood in a light that takes into accounts all perspectives for drawing as close to an objective truth of the state of reality as possible, the Subversive Myth is an absolutely necessary foundation. Otherwise, what is there to study, for what can we be certain of?

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